Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.
Editor: Michael P Birks, Flixton Girls' School, Urmston, Manchester M31 3DR, England 061-747 5924 (Home)

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EDITORIAL

It is with great pride that I pen this editorial to the fortieth edition of our Newsletter. Ten years ago, did we think that the group would last ten years or more? In those days the late Bernard Davies was editor, whilst I typed and printed the copies. Through his encouragement I not only started to write articles for our Newsletter (and later for Linn's and Australian Stamp News) but gained sufficient confidence to be able to take over after his sudden death five years ago. Since then our Newsletter has been a one-man production, and through it I have made many philatelic friends all over the world.

During the last five years I have leant very heavily on the skill and expertise of John Fosbery to guide me, especially in the early issues. His enthusiasm and encouragement have ensured my continual motivation in producing our Newsletter, and maintaining what I believe is a high standard of philatelic content. I am grateful to all those collectors who have contributed to our Newsletter or have simply taken the trouble to write words of encouragement. I realise that not everyone is a budding author, but like most people I need to know my efforts are appreciated, and that I am continuing along the right lines. Finally I must thank Kilian Nathan who has been a good friend to me and a source of encouragement for our Newsletter, and inspiration for my own collection of Nicaragua. Congratulations on your Large Gold at London 1990!

It is my intention that this publication shall continue for as long as I am able to produce it, but please remember whilst I edit, type, print, stuff in envelopes and stick on the stamps, YOU must send me the contents.And your subs!

Thank you to all my friends. MPB

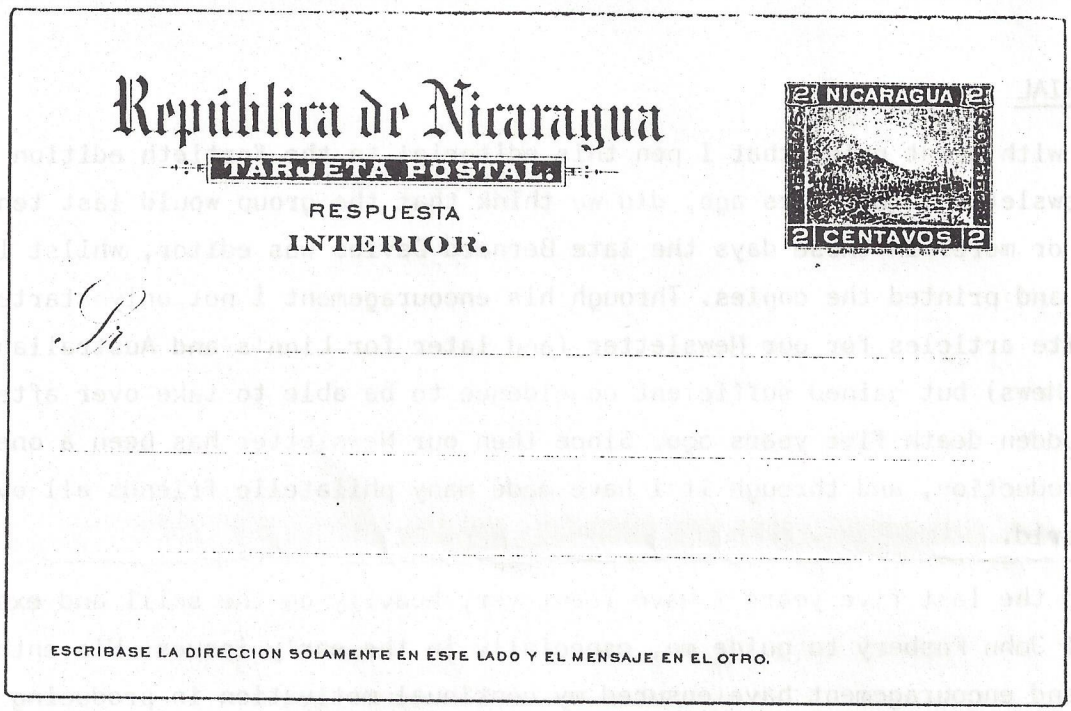
All back issues are still available at 50p/$1 per copy post paid.

THE ASENJO POSTAL STATIONERY OF 1900 by DEREK POCOCK

Higgins and Gage list the following cards for 1900 from the Asenjo issue:

No 48	2c Centavos red	80,000
No 49	6c Centavos ultramarine	? 10,000
No 50	2 + 2c Centavos red	? 15,000
No 51	6 + 6c Centavos ultramarine	8,000

Designs are as for the normal Asenjo stamp issue.

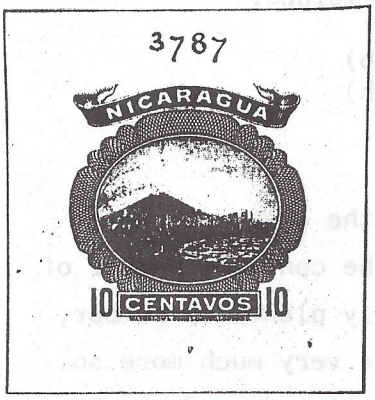


Stroub (q.v.), in listing the 1899 Asenjo contract, reads as follows:

Stamped postal cards:	2 Centavos (domestic)	80,000
	4 Centavos (domestic)	15,000
	2(sic) Centavos (foreign)	10,000
	4(sic) Centavos (foreign)	8,000

Given that the issued higher value was a 6 centavos, my interpretation of this listing is that the "4 Centavos domestic" was the 2 + 2 reply card, the 2 centavos (foreign) was the 6 Centavos and the 4 Centavos (foreign) was the 6 + 6. The general scarcity of the 6 and 6 + 6 in any format is probably reflected in the various surcharges that occurred in 1901 (5 on 6 and 5 + 5 on 6 + 6), in 1904 with various 2c surcharges on the 6c, and the 6 + 6 but divided for individual and local use, and finally Higgins and Gage number 56 with the 2c on 5 + 5 on 6 + 6 divided reply cards.

Finally the 1907 4 Centavos red card with 1907 overprint (Higgins and Gage number 65) does also have the Waterlow imprint though this is only referred to in respect to the equivalent envelope by Higgins and Gage.



Die proof of the Asenjo design, re-engraved by Waterlow and Son, and bearing their imprint underneath. (Mike Birks)

There are positive though small differences between the 2 Centavos card of the American Bank Note Company and this Waterlow issue showing the card was re-engraved. The G of Nicaragua is different, there are no outer frame lines to the upper 4's and the A and O of Centavos are different. Surprisingly the printed headings "of a republica ... interior" are identical but the instruction "Escribase ..." shows minor differences.

When we come to the envelopes the story becomes more complicated. The design uses the same vignette, but with a more ornate oval frame which is also used on the wrappers - of which more later. Now Higgins and Gage list six values with two sizes for some of them and a white wove paper.

No 45	5c blue		250,000
No 46	10c red violet		25,000
No 46a	10c red violet	230 x 100mm	
No 47	15c green		
No 48	20c brown		2,000
No 48a	20c brown	230 x 100mm	
No 49	30c black green		2,000
No 49a	30c black green	230 x 100mm	
No 50	50c red or carmine		2,000
No 50a	50c red or carmine	230 x 100mm	

The standard size for the non 'a' numbers is 160 x 95mm.

Used copies of the 5c and 10c are common but the 20, 30 and 50 are very difficult to find genuine and whole though cut outs are encountered. Also it should be noted that the right edge of the design is normally 5 to 7mm from the folded edge of all the denominations.

However, it is the 15c value that is the most interesting. It seldom occurs in mixed lots of Nicaraguan postal stationery: Higgins and Gage give no price for used copies and the paper on which the few examples are found is very different being a classic cream paper. And to cap it all a 15c envelope is not listed on the original Asenjo contract (see Stroub's paper in the New York Philatelic Society Bulletin of February 1925.

Lastly coming to the wrappers: Higgins and Gage list four values:-

No 27	2c orange	3,000 (Stroub)
No 28	4c dark brown	3,000 (Stroub)
No 29	5c dark green	
No 30	10c grey	

Stroub (idem) shows no evidence of a 5 or 10c wrapper in the contract and I certainly have never seen either value in wrapper form. The contract number of 3,000 of each low value wrapper should indicate a resonably plentiful number, but my experience is that even mint is scarce and used are very much more so. It is of interest that Ascher (1928 ed.) also states the existence of the 5 and 10c wrappers. Perhaps one cataloguer merely repeated the error of the earlier author.

One wonders if this listing of 5 and 10c wrappers is based on what might loosely be called 'cut outs'. This method of collecting postal stationery in the early part of the century has meant an unfortunate loss of whole items (especially used) from this period. Old collections frequently contain mounted cut outs of stationery from all parts of the world.

Now for Nicaragua we seem to have a set of seven available cut outs - the 2c and 4c wrappers and 5, 10, 20, 30 and 50 on envelope paper. However, a randomly acquired selection of these items mint reveals some interesting features. First they are almost all evenly guillotined to a size of 54 x 52.5mm for the "envelope" values or 51 x 51 for the two ex "wrapper" values. This would be a total mathematical improbability if these had been done by multiple collectors. Next the envelope values show an edge to the right side varying between 10½ and 13mm between the cut edge and the left edge of the design yet the envelopes themselves have a maximum of 8mm and usually 5 to 7mm between the design edge of the right margin - there just isn't this space to make such cut outs. On the other hand used cut outs have the narrow right margin that would be expected from original stationery items.

Is it possible that the ABN Company ran off prints from the plates in the issued colours either for samples or as quasi-proofs for collectors? It does not seem as if these bogus cut outs went to Nicaragua either as whole units or as emergency supplies for exhausted stamp stocks.

As to the 15c envelope, this remains a mystery. There was a need for the 15 centavos rate in 1900 (triple letter rate) as evidenced by a 10 centavos stamp added to the 5 centavos envelope or a 5 centavos stamp added to the 10 centavos envelope, but the absence of proven use suggests that these were a trial printing during the year but which was not proceeded with and the samples released onto the collector market.

Can anyone produce a 5 or 10 centavos whole wrapper thus refuting my suggestion that these catalogue entries are a perpetuated error?

Finally should we as a society be in the business of assigning rarity or assessment of value to material? Basically I believe we should not as experience gives us the former and demand regulates the latter. I feel our rôle is to give accurate information on listings and dates to catalogues. It is here that Higgins and Gage need some significant adjustments for current times - a task we should look to implementing.

EARLY TRAVEL ACCOUNTS IN AMERICA by CÉCILE GRUSON

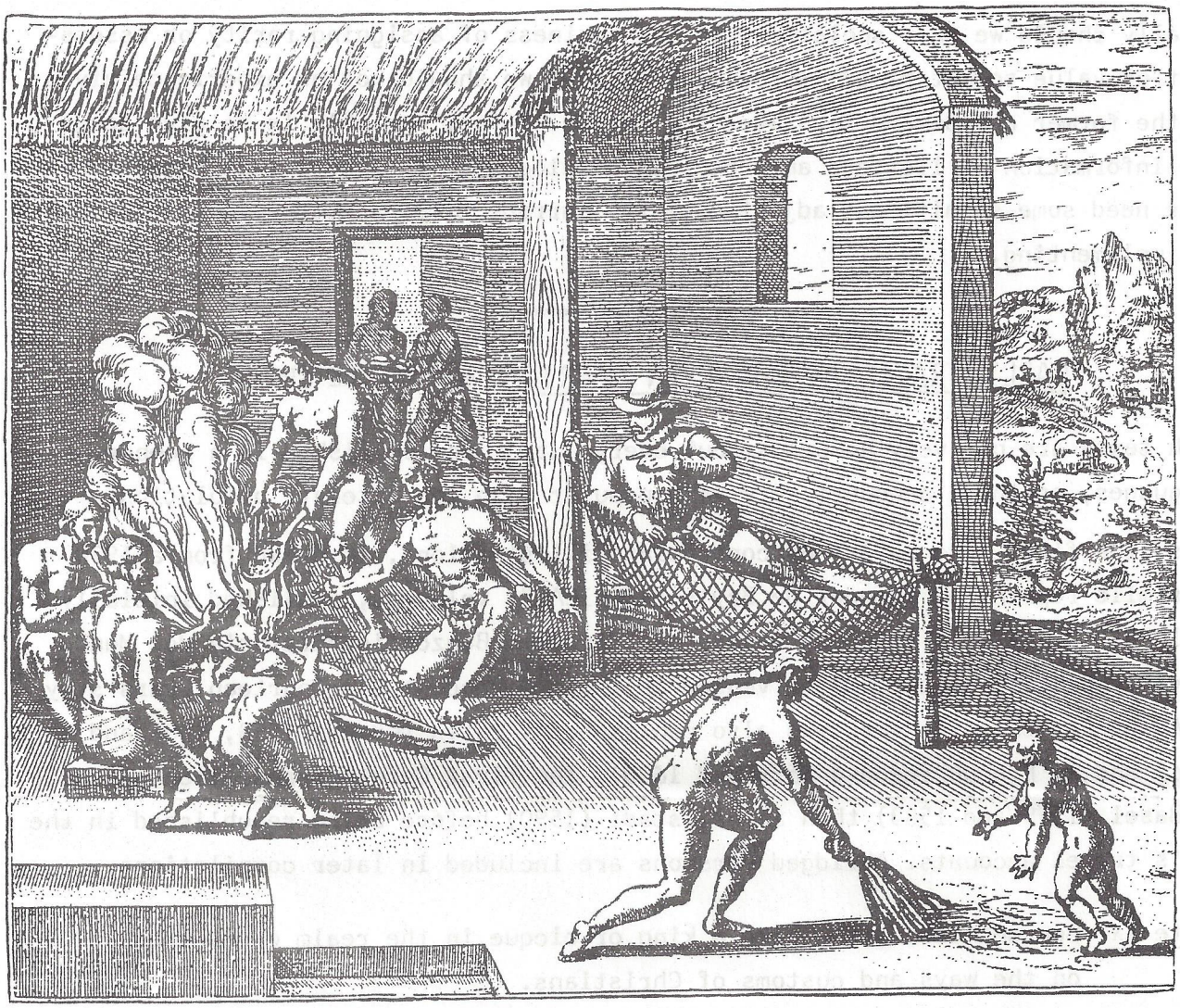
Such texts are not very numerous, but every author was published in a number of languages, as these accounts were very popular with the literate polulation.

This, the first of a series of copperplate illustrations, is drawn from a 1970 facsimile reprint of Theodor de Bry's "AMERICAE", volume V, published initially in 1595. The text is a German version of Girolamo Benzoni's "Historia del Mundo Nuovo", initially published in Venice in 1565 to recount his fourteen years stay in America. Benzoni's work was also published in latin (Geneva 1578, 1581 and 1586) and in French (Geneva 1579 and 1600). The first German translation appeared in Basel (1579 and 1583) then in Helmstadt (1590) before being republished in the Bry's travel accounts. Abridged versions are included in later compilations.

Plate XX Benzoni discussing with a king or cicque in the realm of Nicaragua on the ways and customs of Christians.

While Benzoni was travelling through the province of Nicaragua he was given friendly hospitality by an Indian chief named don Gonzalvo, who was about 70 years old, understood and could speak Spanish. The next morning, as Benzoni was sitting with him, they discussed many subjects. He looked at him straight in the face and said "What good is Christianity to Spaniards? As soon as they enter our dwellings, they plunder all the maize, honey, cotton, silk cloths and other things available, violate our women, and take all the gold and silver they find from us poor Indians. Moreover, they do not work, are liars, frivolous, play, eat, drink, are bad boys and blasphemous besides, even when they go to Church for Mass; they do not do anything else than kill other people and think of getting rich, they even kill each other: the conclusion is that they are naturally scandalous and totally lacking honour." Benzoni answered that this was indeed the case for the bad people, but not for the good ones. The chief then asked where the good people were? "I have yet to meet a good Christian, so far I have only come across bad men and blasphemous people." Benzoni then changed the subject and asked him why and how they had allowed Spaniards to conquer their land. He answered "My dear man, we did the

Des Benzonis Gespräch / so er mit einem Könischen Cacico gehalten in der Landschafft Nicaragua, von dem Wesen vnd Sitten der Christen. XX



ALs Benzo durch die Provintz Nicaragua seine Reiß anstellete, ist er von einem furnemen Obersten Indianer freundlich zur Herberg auffgenommen worden. Es hieß dieser Könische Dun Gonsaluus, war auff die siebentzig Jahr alt / vnd kundt die Spanische Sprach vber die massen wol reden vnd verstehn. Dieser / als Benzo andern Morgens bey jhm sasse von allerley sachen zu reden / sahe jhn stracks an / vnd fieng mit diesen worten zu jhm an zu redē: Lieber Christ sag mir / warzu seind die Christen nütz / oder was seind sie? So bald sie zu vns in vnsere Wonung eintretten / begeren sie vberall Frucht viñ Maiz / Honig / Baumwoll / Seiden Gewand / vnd andere ding / darzu eine Indianerin zu vnzüchtigen sachen / schinden vnd schaben das Golt vnd Silber an allen orten / wo sie es mögen ankoñen / von vns armē Indianern. Vber das / so thun sie keine arbeit / sind verlogene leichtfertige Leut / spielen / fressen / sauffen / sind böse Buben vnd lästern Gott darneben / weñ sie schon in die Kirchen zur Meß gehn / thun sie anders nicht / deñ daß sie fabulirn viñ andere Leut außrichten / vnd sind jre Gedancken anders wo im Gerstenfeldt / sie selbst hawen / stechen / vnd erwürgen sich vndereinander / in Suiña es sind gantz schandlose ehrvergessene Leut von natur. Als Benzo aber zur antwort gab / daß solches allein von den bösen geschehe / vnd nicht von den froñen. Da sagt er darauff / wo sind man deñ derselbigen froñen? Furwar es ist mir noch kein frommer Christ vnder augen koñen / sonder eitel böse Bubē vnd lasterhafftige Leut. Darauff verdrehet jm Benzo die rede / vnd fragt von jm / wie vnd waruñ sie die Spanier in jhr Land hetten kommen lassen vnd auff genommen? Darauff antwortet er also / Mein lieber Mañ / wir haben dz beste gethan / vnd haben vns gewehrt so lang wir gekönt haben / Als wir aber von jnen durch Hülff jhrer Pferde zum offtermal sind geschlagen vnd vberwunden worden / haben wir es für rathsamer angesehen / jr Joch auff vns zu nemen / als daß vnser Geschlecht / durch stetige Krieg vnd Blut vergiessen solte gantz vnd gar vndergehen vnd außgerottet werden.

utmost to resist them the best we could, but after being beaten time and again by them and their horses, we preferred to accept their domination rather than have our nation completely wiped out by continual wars and bloodshed."

A PROBLEM WITH THE FOREIGN REGISTRATION RATES IN COSTA RICA AFTER 1883

by RICHARD H SAUNDRY

Introduction

I have been interested in collecting Costa Rican registered covers for a few years and I have been fortunate enough to have exhibited my collection at both National and International Exhibition levels with a fair degree of success. There has always been one area within my display, however, that has worried me. I have always tried to explain the reason why each and every cover in my exhibit was rated at such-and-such a tariff. This has generally been quite straight forward, but when we look more closely at the covers for the 1890-1923 period, there are quite a number of covers that do not seem to conform to the expected postal rates.

A Description of the Rates

Let us look at the rates that should be expected for outgoing foreign Costa Rican registered letters of this period. In 1883, when Costa Rica joined the UPU, new postal rates were introduced to conform to the rates of other member countries. These rates were published in LA GACETA, No.1439, for the 22nd of December, 1882 (Saenz Mata, 1984:124), where we find that for foreign mail, the registration rate was set at 10 centavos and for the attendant "A.R." service (Aviso de Recepcion; Acknowledgement of Receipt) an additional 5 centavos was charged. If these were the true rates that were put into effect, then we should expect to find, for foreign registered letters, rates of either 10 or 15 centavos (if "A.R." service was requested) to be added to the foreign letter rate that was set in 1883, at 10 centavos per 15 grams. Thus for foreign registered letters rates of 20, 30 or 40 centavos should be expected for single, double and triple weight registered letters. With "A.R." service, then covers should be found with 25, 35 and 45 centavos rates.

At this time there was no Pan American Postal Union in operation (which did not start until 1923, later to be turned into the Postal Union of the Americas and Spain), so all countries, except for a few neighbouring Central American states, were to be treated as foreign UPU countries which also included the United States. As I understand it, it was only after 1923, when the Pan American Postal Union came into effect that the various co-signatories began to exchange their mails at the respective domestic rates. Thus for our purpose, we can expect that in the 1883-1922 period, all Costa Rican mail addressed to the United States should be treated as all other foreign mail, which is very fortunate since, as stated above, a goodly proportion of all surviving registered covers were sent to the United States.

There is one additional problem that has to be recognised. In 1917, the Costa Rican foreign rates were increased to 15, 30 and 45 centimos for the three lower weight levels, giving rise to composite registration rates of 25, 40 and 55 centimos. With "A.R." service, an additional 5 centimos would be expected to be charged.

The Problem Illustrated

The above might seem quite straight forward, but it has always worried me that when I look at my collection of registered covers, I find that a fair number appear to have been charged as "A.R." covers without being specified as such. This problem is illustrated with two such covers (Nos.2 and 3 in the list below, and illustrated on the opposite page). The first case is of a registered cover to Austria rated at 35 centavos, sent from San Jose on April 11, 1892. If this was a double-weight letter, it should have attracted a franking of 30 centavos, less than was charged. The second example is of a cover to Austria, dated September 15, 1895, franked at 25 centavos the proper amount for a foreign single-weight "A.R." cover.

These are just two of many examples from my collection that best illustrate the problem, since they are both from the early 1890's and thus are not too distant from the time that the UPU rates were introduced.

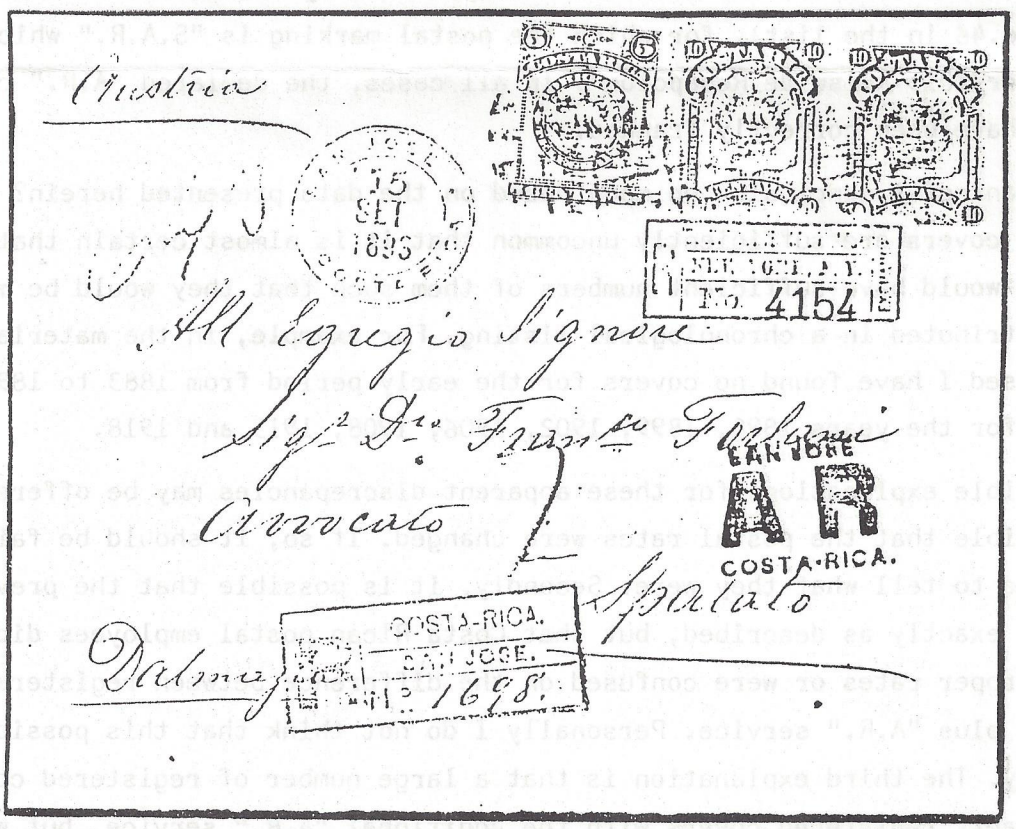
A Listing of Registered Covers

I have gathered together all the registered covers in my collection and added to these those described in recent OXCART Mail Bid Sales. The list contains fifty-two covers for the 1890-1923 period. Although no claims of completeness are made, I have tried to be fair and to reject those registered covers that were given outlandishly or unexpectedly high frankings as probably philatelically contrived.

Survey of Foreign Registered Covers for 1883-1923

No.	Date	Destination	Frank	Proper Y/N	No.	Date	Destination	Frank	Proper Y/N
1	10/9/90	USA	25c	N	17	8/5/03	Holland	20c	Y
2	11/4/92	Austria	35c	N	18	7/1/04	Germany	20c	Y
3	15/9/95	AR Austria	25c	Y	19	15/10/04	Switzerland	30c	Y
4	1895	AR Sweden	35c	Y	20	1904	AR USA	25c	Y
5	29/11/96	France	25c	N	21	14/1/05	Nicaragua	35c	?
6	-/10/97	France	25c	N	22	20/6/07	Germany	20c	Y
7	1897	AR England	25c	Y	23	1907	USA	85c	N
8	1897	AR USA	25c	Y	24	1907	England	25c	N
9	2/10/97	AR Trinidad	35c	Y	25	1909	USA	25c	N
10	92 stamps	AR England	25c	Y	26	1909	England	25c	N
11	92 stamps	AR Germany	25c	Y	27	1909	USA	20c	Y
12	1900	Switzerland	50c	Y	28	5/5/09	USA	25c	N
13	10/2/01	Italy	25c	N	29	1910	USA	30c	Y
14	1901	USA	25c	N	30	1910	USA	20c	Y
15	14/6/03	Austria	20c	Y	31	1911	USA	30c	Y
16	1903	Uruguay	20c	Y	32	23/10/11	USA	25c	N

An 1892 Cover to Austria, Improperly(?) Franked



An 1895 "AR" Cover to Austria, Properly Franked

No.	Date	Destination	Frank	Proper Y/N	No.	Date	Destination	Frank	Proper Y/N
33	27/10/12	Germany	25c	N	43	9/6/19	USA	40c	Y
34	1914	USA	25c	N	44	25/2/20	USA	30c	N
35	1914	Switzerland	25c	N	45	29/3/20	Austria	30c	N
36	24/1/16	France	30c	Y	46	26/6/20	AR Austria	15c	Y
37	6/6/16	France	25c	N	47	5/8/21	Nicaragua	15c	?
38	9/4/17	France	25c	Y	48	25/8/21	USA	30c	N
39	19/4/17	USA	25c	N	49	10/11/22	Curacao	40c	Y
40	11/7/17	Switzerland	25c	Y	50	7/4/23	France	40c	Y
41	29/12/17	Switzerland	45c	N	51	4/7/23	France	40c	Y
42	28/4/19	USA	30c	N	52	14/7/23	France	40c	Y

Summary and Conclusions

Fifty-two registered covers from Costa Rica to foreign destinations were considered in this study. Two of these covers (Nos.21 and 47) were addressed to Nicaragua for which special postal agreements may have been operative. Of the remaining fifty covers, only twenty-eight (fifty-six per cent) seem to conform to the expected foreign registration rates. In this survey, nine of the registered covers had postal markings to indicate that they were "A.R." covers. Of these, seven were "grouped" together within the relatively short period from 1895 to 1897. The exception to this "run" of "A.R." marked covers was a solitary example for 1904 (No.20 in the list), and a further example from my collection sent to Austria in 1920 (No.46 in the list), for which the postal marking is "S.A.R." which I take to mean "Servicio Aviso de Recepcion". In all cases, the declared "A.R." covers appear to have been correctly franked.

Can any meaningful conclusion be made based on the data presented herein? Registered covers are sufficiently uncommon that it is almost certain that few collectors would have sufficient numbers of them such that they would be more evenly distributed in a chronological listing. For example, in the material that I have analysed I have found no covers for the early period from 1883 to 1890, and no covers for the years 1898, 1899, 1902, 1906, 1908, 1915 and 1918.

Three possible explanations for these apparent discrepancies may be offered. First, it is possible that the postal rates were changed. If so, it should be fairly easy for someone to tell what they were. Secondly, it is possible that the prevailing rates were exactly as described, but that Costa Rican postal employees did not know the proper rates or were confused on the difference between registered and registered plus "A.R." service. Personally I do not think that this possibility is very likely. The third explanation is that a large number of registered covers were, in fact, registered covers with the additional "A.R." service, but were not postmarked as such. It may be significant that the covers that were marked as "A.R." were all from the same relatively short period. Could it be possible that for the greater part of the 1883-1923 period, there was no "A.R." postmark available for

use in the post offices of Costa Rica (even though, if memory serves me correctly, international "A.R." service began about 1891). Surely the registration rates for this period are open to better interpretation.

Reference

Saenz Mata, Carlos (1984). Era de Oro de la Filatelia Costarricense, 1863-1903. San Jose: Editorial Costa Rica.

Extracted from OXCART, No.117, Winter 1989-90.

The President of Spanish Main, John Fosbery, is endeavouring to accumulate and collate information on registered mail from all South and Central American Republics. His ideal is to end up with a chapter on each Republic, an opening chapter or two on general aspects and similarities of the various systems and finally an appendix setting out information on rates. He will need a great deal of help and co-operation to achieve his goal but in any case interesting information on this subject must come to light in the course of his researches and this will form useful copy for the Spanish Main Newsletters and for Mainsheet.

Notes on Nicaragua are well under way and we hope to start to publish these in our next Nessletter.

Information on registered mail from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico is needed. Collectors must own one or two covers from the countries they collect. Please write in with information about them or if you are uncertain on any point a cover may disclose, tell us what you hope may be explained.

Write in to our Editor or direct to:-

John Fosbery, 52 St Leonards Road, Newton Abbot, Devon TQ12 1JX, England

Hopefully the above article on Costa Rica will bring replies and comments. In any case it gives us a start on the story of registered mail of Costa Rica.

SEEBECK, HERO OR VILLAIN?

We still have a few copies left of the English translation of the excellent work on the life and work of Nicholas Seebeck, by one of our members, Danilo A Mueses. We priced this publication "at cost" at £5 (UK) $9 (elsewhere) post paid, and so are anxious to recover our costs by selling the last few copies.

The book, covering 89 A4 pages, is the most detailed account of this much maligned entrepreneur published to date and concludes with an analysis of his motivés and an evaluation of his impact on the philatelic scene then and now.

If you have an interest in Seebecks, then this book will fascinate you. MPB

COSTA RICA: ANOTHER INVERTED CENTRE by RICHARD YUDIN

In September of 1973 I lived in Golfito, a banana port on the southern tip of Costa Rica. One day someone in our office received a package of books from the University, and I asked the secretary to retrieve the stamps for me. Some time later she came in, full of apologies, and handed me a number of battered specimens which her assistant had cut from the wrapping. Among them was a copy of the blue fifty centimos of the Tourism issue of 1972, with an inverted centre, ruined by a cut in the lower right corner.

Some months later when in San Jose I visited Don Ricardo Alvarez's stamp shop, Libreria Karam, and inquired about the inverted centre. Other collectors had also spotted the error, and there had apparently been one sheet. I cannot remember which Post Office it was reported to have been sold from, except that it was not the obvious one at San Pedro. Can any of our readers provide us with the relevant details surrounding the release of this stamp?

The illustration above is of my damaged example, and shows the swimmers at the upper edge of the frame, and a man hanging by his heels from the upper left corner! The intrusion by the colour printing into the value tablet at the upper right corner is also quite clear.